

# **The Customer Service Workplace**

Steven R. Van Hook, PhD

## ***Customer Service Job Description***

Simply put, the customer service worker (CSW) answers questions and solves problems. These tasks require solid listening and communication skills, and the ability to connect with customers through many different forms of media.

The foremost job of the CSW is to interact with customers, clients, constituents, and so forth on behalf of a company or organization. CSWs might provide information about products and services; they might also collect detail on a customer's complaints and help resolve them. And, CSWs might also take orders and handle returns or refunds.

There are more than 2 million customer service jobs in the United States alone. Here are some different types of customer service jobs:

- Receptionist/Front Desk Clerk
- Salesperson
- Insurance Agent
- Data Entry/Order Clerk
- Repair Service Technician
- Telemarketing Specialist
- Call Center Representative
- Counter & Rental Clerk
- Food Service Worker
- Travel Professional
- Child Care Provider
- Security Guard

### ***Featured Customer Service Workplace***

**[Best Buy](#)**

Please spend 30 minutes visiting this website and pay special attention to these customer service features:

*Community Forums / Twelpforce / Chat Now / Help Topics Listing*

A typical job description for a CSW might include these specific duties:

- Listen and respond to customers' needs and concerns.
- Provide information about products and services.
- Take orders, determine charges, and oversee billing or payments.
- Review or make changes to customer accounts.
- Handle returns or complaints.
- Record details of customer contacts and actions taken.
- Research answers or solutions as needed.
- Refer customers to supervisors, managers, or others who can help.

Customer service workers may work in a customer contact centers using telephones, email and live chat connections; or they might be stationed at service desks providing face-to-face service to customers on site. The CSWs may work from a manual that provides solutions and answers for most potential questions and problems. If an employee is unable to resolve a problem, she or he may turn to a team member or supervisor for assistance.

Some CSWs specialize in using a single mode of communication such as telephone, email, or chat; others are assigned to communicate with customers using several modes. As such, CSWs need to have solid communication skills, as well as up-to-date technical skills related to the various communication technologies and software programs.

Most every type of business and service agency provides customer service or support, and workers may need to develop specialized knowledge in a particular field such as banking, public utilities, consumer electronics, computer software, etc. CSWs in a retail store often may help customers learn how to use a product, or handle a return for defective or unsatisfactory purchases.

### ***The Customer Service Workplace***

Customer service workers in a contact center might be placed at a workstation, outfitted with a telephone, headset, and computer. These call centers may be very busy and noisy, with non-stop stressful work. Workers in a retail store might be equally busy, dealing with a long line of customers. Whether in person, on the phone, or over the computer, the customers are frequently frustrated and upset, and often angry and challenging.

Supervisors will closely assess the performance of the CSWs to ensure they are working efficiently and accurately. The supervisors may listen in on telephone calls, monitor online communications, and review records of customer interactions.

Most CSWs hold fulltime jobs, and must be prepared to work a variety of shifts as an increasing number of companies provide 24-hour support service. It is common for employers to require CSWs to work weekends, holidays, and rotating day/evening shifts. In retail stores, weekends and holidays may be the most demanding time for customer services.

### ***Qualifications and Preparation***

Most CSWs have a high school diploma. They must also have good communication and interpersonal abilities, and fundamental computer and telephone skills. They typically receive some on-the-job training before assuming their duties.

The customer-service-workplace training may last from two weeks to several months if there is specialized knowledge about an industry or product the worker must learn. The training may include background about the company and its services or products, the typical customer issues and questions, the communication systems that may be used, and other matters specific to a given position.

Training, which might take place in a combination of classroom and workplace settings, might be counted as paid time. Since products and services are constantly changing, additional training may well be an ongoing process.

Since some products and services, such as banking and highly regulated industries, are more complicated to learn, some CSWs might be preferred or required to have some college education or a degree. CSWs who work with insurance or financial companies may be required to pass written exams and hold special licenses. Preparatory training for such industry-specific requirements is often provided by employers.

### ***Important Skillsets***

This course aims to help develop the skills necessary to become an effective and successful CSW. These abilities often need to be bundled into a set of skills to meet the demands of employers, customers, and the situation at hand. We will be further addressing these skillsets in the materials ahead:

**Communication skillsets.** A CSW must engage sensitive listening and speaking skills to accurately assess and respond to a customers' questions and needs. The worker needs to be comfortable with communication media including telephone calls, email, and live chat; and be able to communicate clearly and accurately, with proper use of written and spoken styles.

**Problem-solving skillsets.** To help resolve customer issues, the CSW needs to be able to analyze problems, research answers, and help customers implement solutions. These problem-solving skillsets may be considerably expanded for positions such as computer support specialists, bank tellers, financial advisors, and other positions requiring special studies and certifications.

**Customer-service skillsets.** A CSW needs to handle questions and problems with a friendly and professional demeanor. Customers may come from many different backgrounds, be frustrated and confused, be angry and difficult—so the CSW needs to be patient, understanding, sympathetic, polite, and create a positive relationship to help resolve the problem at hand, and represent the company well to help ensure good ongoing business standing.

***Summary:***

- The job of the customer service worker is to answer questions, resolve issues, and provide customer satisfaction.
- Customer service workers provide a number of functions in most every industry, sometimes working face-to-face, other times in customer service centers using telephone and computer technology.
- The typical customer service job is fulltime, and frequently doesn't require more than a high school diploma.
- Most customer service positions will require some in-house training, and possible licensure depending on the nature of the job.
- Important skillsets to develop in this course include communication, problem solving, and specific customer service tactics.